

COMMERCIALIZATION STRATEGIES IN FOOTBALL

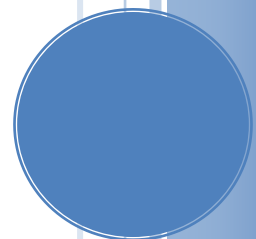
Master thesis

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Abstract

Since the 1980s there has been a large economic development in the football industry. As a result, most professional football clubs are structured as corporations. Though, there is a minority of clubs that are structured as membership clubs. In this assignment the differences in commercial strategy were examined between membership clubs and non-membership clubs. Also, the levels of supporter satisfaction were compared between these types of clubs. In modern day football commercialization is required for clubs in order to stay financially competitive, though football fans are regularly discontented with how the cultures of their clubs are changing due to this development. In the research process, case studies were performed with three football clubs; one membership club, one non-membership club and one mixed club. The examination of the data results was carried out by a within case analysis for each club and a cross case analysis. After analyzing the data, two different commercialization approaches were found; a corporate business approach is present at the non-membership club and an approach that focuses on building a traditional football identity at the membership club. The mixed club showed a midway strategy. Furthermore, it was observed that the membership club had a higher satisfaction rate among its fan base than the non-membership club. The mixed club had an intermediate fan satisfaction level. Concluding, the membership club was observed to be more successful in dealing with the dilemma of commercialization and fan approval.

Preface

This assignment is the result of the research that I have conducted to finish the master Business Administration at the University of Twente. Football can be defined as a strong business nowadays with a transnational character and thus represents an interesting subject in the field of International Management. I have always had a passion for the sport of football, especially the art of the game on the pitch itself, but also the culture and management practices that surround the sport. As a result, looking back, working on this assignment was an interesting and enjoyable journey.

I would like to thank all people that provided me with advice and useful information during the course of this assignment. Special thanks goes out to my two supervisors. Their constructive feedback and available time was important and supported me in finishing the assignment. Furthermore, I would like to thank my family and friends for their motivational support.

Tim Krabbenbos,

Enschede

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Sport is a hobby or leisure time activity for most people. However, it is also increasingly established that sport is also a business (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). In this research assignment the emphasis is on the football industry. In the sport of football an important transformation took place.

In general, football clubs have originated since the 1850s and the majority of European clubs are about 100 years of age. When the game attracted spectators and players became financially compensated, business practices developed into the clubs that were until then just sporting associations. Thus, to a certain extent business has always been a part of sports. However, since the 1980s there has been a large economic development in the sport with an involvement of corporations and other business institutions. During these last decades business in football has grown enormously and football clubs have commercialized largely.

Consequently, the football industry now is an international business; international professional competitions are established, players are transferred all over the world and the European Championship finals and FIFA World Cup finals are top media events with television broadcasting all over the world. Football is also said to be the most popular sport globally (Richelieu, Lopez & Desbordes, 2008). And although the currently very challenging economic times there is a continued revenue growth in European football, illustrating the continued loyalty of supporters and the continued appeal of football to sponsors and broadcasters (Deloitte, 2010).

While the finances of professional football clubs have increased massively and attitudes have changed, the fans among others have experienced important changes in the cultural organization of the sport (Giulianotti, 2002). Often there is a change of culture and some traditions are lost among clubs that have commercialized. As a result many of the supporters have shown their discontent and have contested the fast changing state of modern football (Nash, 2000).

Furthermore, an interesting situation in the football industry is that a minority of clubs are owned by their supporters. In these so called membership clubs, the ownership is spread out among a large amount of fans. Consequently, the fans at these clubs have an important influence on how the club is commercializing.

1.2 Problem statement

One of the main problems with increasing commercialism is the alienation of football fans. Frequently, erosion occurs of the identities and traditional values upon which football clubs

are built. As a result of these changes, supporters often cannot identify anymore with their football club and a lack of satisfaction among supporters starts to develop.

1.3 Objective

In this research assignment the applied commercialization strategies of football clubs with different types of fan influence are investigated. The purpose is to identify whether there are differences in commercialization strategy between football clubs that are owned by supporters and football clubs that are not owned by supporters. In addition, the second aim is to investigate what result this has on the satisfaction of supporters.

1.4 Research question

Main question:

- *What is the difference in commercialization strategy between membership football clubs and non-membership football clubs and what effect does the commercialization strategy have on supporter satisfaction?*

Sub questions:

- *What differences can be observed in commercialization strategy between membership football clubs and non-membership football clubs?*
- *What is the result on supporter satisfaction?*

1.5 Research strategy

As regards the research strategy a qualitative approach is used. The literature review defines the keywords of the research and explores the constructs to arrive at a research framework. In this research a multiple case method is used, whereby three football clubs are explored regarding their commercialization strategy and their relationship with supporters. Concerning the data collection, secondary data was used that consisted of organization websites, publications, journals and books. The results consist of the accumulated data, which are then analyzed and discussed.

1.6 Relevance

It is increasingly accepted that sport is also an industry in its own right and, in some cases, is even perceived as being a commercial activity (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). The evidence is compelling: the United Nations believes that sport may account for almost 3 per cent of global economic activity; in the European Union, the figure is thought to be around 1 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and in the UK sport is thought to generate around 2.5 per cent of GDP. Estimates for the USA indicate that sport is worth almost \$300 billion per annum to the US economy. Contributing to these figures, some sports and sporting organizations are of such a size and scale that they warrant comparison with large, global organizations.

Regarding sports football is one of the most popular. It is the number one sport with regard to media attention and audience reception globally (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2002). However, there is a multibillion euro industry in professional football that is hardly recognized in scientific articles, as demonstrated by Nilsson (2005). Football has experienced dramatic changes over the last 10 years, with some estimates indicating that the global game is now worth \$12 billion per annum while commentators suggest the industry grew in size by up to 25 per cent during the same period (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). According to Wright (1999) football has attracted special academic interest both in regard to the globalization of the sport and the impact of the worldwide game on national identities. European football is becoming more and more important to research in international business and business administration (Hamil & Chadwick, 2010). The reason is that it is a giant and fast growing business, working at a global level, but still in need of a more systemized knowledge.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, an overview of the literature that is relevant for this study is described. The theoretical framework is formed on the three components that constitute the research question, i.e. commercialization, (non) member ownership and supporter satisfaction. First, the literature on football commercialization is outlined, describing the commercial developments, the commercial structures of football clubs and the prevailing modern business model among clubs. Next, the differences and (dis)advantages of member-owned clubs vis-a-vis non member-owned clubs are summarized, with a look into general business and in the football industry in particular. Then, the literature findings concerning the satisfaction or contentment of football supporters are described, including the importance of supporter relations and the changing dynamics. Finally, the base of a model, derived from the theory, is presented which deals with the second part of the research question.

2.1 Commercialization of professional football

Commercialization events

In professional football the role of financial capital has increased significantly over time. Before the 1990s, the aim of professional clubs was to entertain the fans by accomplishing sport success while staying solvent and not to maximize profit. Finding ways to improve playing success is the most important, and the clubs can be described as win (utility) maximization oriented.

In the 1990s, an increased involvement of global media conglomerates in football took place. For media companies the broadcasting of sporting events had become a very important tool to attract viewers and advertisers (Williams, 1993; Sandvoss, 2003). The Bosman arrest was also a keystone event. The Bosman ruling is a 1995 European Court of Justice decision concerning freedom of movement for workers and freedom of association. The case was an important decision on the free movement of labour and had a profound effect on the transfers of football players.

Due to events like these, commercialization accelerated in the 1990s in professional football and clubs increasingly compete with each other on financial capital. The need for income from broadcasting, merchandising and sponsoring, led to a high commercialization of professional football. Professional football had changed to a consumer-oriented service where the market is very essential. The football industry changed from a utility maximizing to a more profit maximizing consumers-oriented service (Dejonghe, 2008).

The commercialization of football has changed the income structure of football clubs largely. The money a club takes in on the day of the match was traditionally its major source of revenue. Match day revenue is mostly derived from gate receipts (including season tickets

and memberships). This main reliance on match day income is not the case anymore today. Nowadays, a large part of income is acquired by revenue derived from broadcast sources, commercial sources (sponsorship/merchandising), player transfer fees and non-football activities (Deloitte, 2010; Forbes, 2011;).

Commercial characteristics of the modern football firm

Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) address the economic globalisation in football by considering the world's leading clubs as "glocal" transnational corporations. They affirm the utility of sport in advancing our empirical and theoretical understanding of globalisation processes. Croci and Ammirante state (1999) that football clubs are more and more turning into publicly owned stock firms responding to the logic of the market. The clubs are selling an increased amount of products, not just the soccer match, far beyond the local ground, to supporters that are simultaneously defined as consumers. This type of neo-liberal restructuring has already taken place in other regions of the global economy. Modern day football clubs are characterized by high diversification based on a new proactive approach towards commercial opportunities (Dolles & Soderman, 2005). More and more, top clubs have increased the range of commercial features, merchandize and facilities to supporters and increased the range and scope of their commercial actions.

According to Vic Duke (2002) some of the processes covered by the concepts of McDonaldisation and Disneyisation have infiltrated in modern day professional football clubs. In the concept of McDonaldisation the principles of the fast food restaurant are progressively more applied to other sectors of society (Ritzer, 1993). In the literature of Disneyisation the principles of the Disney theme parks are getting more dominant in other sectors of society (Bryman, 1999). These two concepts overlap to a certain degree, but they are mostly distinct. McDonaldisation is based on the idea of rationalization, while in Disneyisation the theories of consumerism apply. Both these concepts illustrate the growing Americanization of sport and globalization in general.

In acquiring capital the fan or consumer is essential. Hence marketing, and more specifically branding, is a very important theme in the development of professional football clubs. Sport clubs produce an emotional response from their supporters that is greater than in any other industry, excluding actors and singers (Underwood, Bond & Baer, 2001). In the attempt to capitalize of the emotional relationship they share with their supporters, professional sports clubs try to position themselves as brands. By having a powerful brand, clubs can potentially build and take care of supporter's loyalty. And this assists in creating additional revenues by transaction of a range of goods and services (Burton & Howards, 1999; Gustafson, 2001; Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000).

Milanovic argues (2005) that free movement of high skilled labour, increasing returns and endogenous skills will, in the conditions of unequal initial distribution of resources, tend to produce an increasing concentration in outcomes whether it be income or football results.

An important assumption in their research is the increasing returns to scale. The free movement of labour and increasing returns lead to an overall increase in output, or in the quality of football as the best players are paired to play with those who are as well among the best. With only commercial rules the problem is that the general improved quality of the football game is accompanied by increased inequality.

Business model in modern football

The finances of a club are an important factor for achievement in football. Empirical research specifies there is a positive relation between budget and team performance (Dejonghe, 2004). In order to examine the elements that contribute to increasing budgets and consequently success, the concept of cumulative causation by Myrdal can be applied. Myrdal devised the theory of cumulative causation with the aim of to explain the diverse development paths that areas and countries may follow. The concept was applied by Dejonghe (2004) to the football industry. The model in figure 1 is by Dejonghe et al (2010).

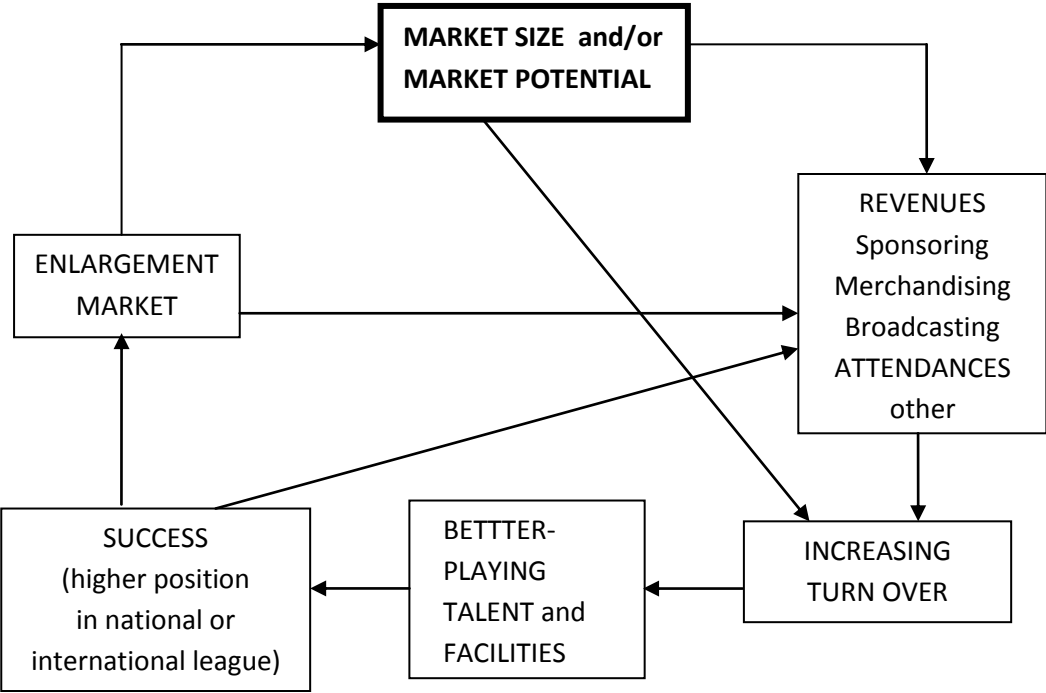


Figure 1: Cumulative causation in football, Dejonghe et al (2010)

Cumulative causation describes the unfolding of a series of indicators that are connected. When viewing the supply side, this is the quality of the service (quality of the football game). Regarding the demand side (the football consumer), alterations on the supply side often

affect match-day earnings, proceeds from merchandising, sponsorship and media rights. This influence is mutual, i.e. changes on the demand side affect the supply side and vice versa. Many spectators in the stadium result in more money from sponsors and media, which can be invested in players which consequently increases the sport results and more spectators etc.

The amount of customers available in the market region is one of the triggers for the cumulative causation development. Clubs in nations and cities with a small amount of inhabitants have a competitive disadvantage. In the professional football industry a professional management attitude developed, because of the increasing influence of television and media organizations and the increasing interest of international firms.

2.2 Supporter ownership

In this research a distinction is made between non-supporter owned clubs and supporter owned clubs. The majority of professional football clubs are not owned by their supporters. They are for instance owned by private investors, industrial enterprises, wealthy industrialists, media companies and other groups of (business) people (Hoehn & Szymanski, 1999). Though, there is a significant minority of professional football clubs that are (co) owned by their supporters, so called membership clubs. The ownership in these clubs is spread out among a large number of supporters, also known as members.

The most important benefit from a business structure, for instance a privately owned company with shares structure, as opposed to a membership structure, is the ability to attract large private investment. Many football clubs in the world have been taken over by private investors (i.e. Manchester United, Chelsea, Vitesse Arnhem etc) who have injected large amounts of capital in the clubs to make them compete more effectively in the global football player transfer market. Though, the supporter ownership approach has benefits as well. Next, the advantages of this approach are outlined in general business (Brown, 2009), where it is often referred to as mutual business or mutual ownership, and in the football industry.

In general business

According to Brown (2009) mutual business is arguably a better and more direct path to moving business to the interest of its stakeholders by making stakeholders owners. Furthermore, research of Building Societies Organisation (2008) has pointed out regarding mutual ownership:

- They are considered to be more trustworthy by users/members.
- Enlarged accountability associated with member ownership.

- Organizations function in the interests of their customers or users, because there are no investors whose profit aspirations conflict with the users who want to have a good service.

According to Mills (2001) mutual ownership has several advantages:

- By their involvement in ownerships, groups of users get more aligned.
- Democracy: Since becoming a member is open to anyone, it is possible for all members to contribute in a democratic way in the association.
- Long term focus: Investor-owned businesses are usually criticized for their tendency towards short term thinking. This does not count for mutual organizations. They should make decisions founded on the interest of the organization in serving its community. These interests cover the long term interests of existing and upcoming members of the community.

With regard to this last point, Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) write that available data states that firms that function based on long term interests of their stakeholders rather than short term interest in their shareholders have a higher chance to do well. Furthermore, Bruque et al (2003) write that membership owned organisms produce collective behavior and drive individuals to become active to control and support their own and the group interest. And members have an increased satisfaction with the company as a result of their enlarged participation. Additionally, in the literature on employee participation in the strategic change management of companies, Lines (2004) states that involvement of the employees affected by organizational change, decreases resistance and creates higher commitment towards the planned changes. Lines (2004) finds a strong positive link between participation and objective achievement and organizational commitment, and a strong negative link with resistance.

In the football industry

Morrow (2003) describes the main clash between the position of football clubs as profit searching companies and football clubs as social organizations. There is a conflict in football in which clubs aspire to be considered part of the community with local identities and traditions and the aspirations to be revenue seeking businesses (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012). Arnaut (2006) adds that a football club cannot have a mainly profit maximizing attitude, because it has a wider role in the community that does not imply only financial value. Therefore, the football industry is perhaps less suitable for an investor ownership model.

Arnaut (2006) describes various problems with the business model of football club ownership:

- Vulnerable to takeover. The membership model has a better protection against ownership of the club by corrupt individuals.
- Doubtful regarding to whether minority shareholders and supporters have an influence in running the club.

- There is wide-ranging evidence in professional football that the general company model has not done well in any traditional manner. It is illustrated by the often poor finances and high levels of debt of many football clubs.

2.3 Supporter satisfaction

Supporter relations

The major developments in professional football have had an important effect on clubs and the relationships with their fan base. Kennedy & Kennedy (2012) write that supporters have been very resistant to the commercialization of football. Since, the rise and coming of commercialization within the football industry, supporters have seen their football clubs transform from traditional community clubs into corporate business organizations. As a result supporters often cannot identify anymore with their club and become dissatisfied. According to Arnaut (2006) the real values of football are being eroded and the fans will become more and more disaffected with the game.

On the whole, football fans enjoy the extra funding that clubs acquire because of corporate sponsorship. But from many fans perspectives, over-commercialization that is only profit motivated often takes place, where the long term wellness of the club is not considered important by the sponsors. Edensor and Millington (2008) write that when setting strategies clubs must be cautious to avoid alienating football club supporters by fueling fears of crass commercialism and must appeal to their social and cultural values, tastes and loyalties. The principal challenge is the coordination and combining of success with a positive brand image (Kearney, 2004; Edensor and Millington, 2008) and fan loyalty with commercialization (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Jacobson, 2004). Hamil & Chadwick (2010) add that football club managements should aim to find the correct balance between the commercialization of their club and its financial advantages, and at the other side attending and functioning to the needs and expectations of the football club fan.

Subsequently, Hamil & Chadwick (2010) write that the large revenues that football clubs create are only achievable because of the large, ongoing supporter demand for the sport. The supporters are the market for match-day, broadcasting and commercial revenue. They are also the attendants of the stadia and therefore become part of the product itself, as part of the game that is sold to other consumers (Hamil & Chadwick, 2010). According to Kennedy & Kennedy (2012) the large increase of financial capital in football is generated, directly and indirectly, by the commercial exploitation of football fans and their loyalty to their clubs. There is a consumption strategy of football by sophisticated merchandising systems that exploit fan bases and the increase of prices for viewing football, regarding stadium tickets and pay-per-view broadcasting. And with their participation supporters help to construct the game that attracts commercial sponsors. Supporters often feel disillusioned

with their club acting like a business, but they feel there is no way out but to support their club`s struggle to stay financially competitive with other clubs (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012).

Decline of traditional supporters

Due to the dissatisfaction of many supporters and the increasing cost of viewing the football game, there is a relative decline of traditional supporters and an increase of new consumer fans. According to Giulianotti (1999) many football clubs have working class origins and a generational supporters group that has retained loyal to the club in good periods and bad periods. They often respond highly against, in their perspective, too much commercialization of their club. Giulianotti (1999) states that television and merchandising business have: “successfully targeted a new, young, middle-class audience whose club affiliations are the most plastic of all”. The working classes are relatively more attached to local identities and values and stay loyal. Middle and upper classes are relatively more cosmopolitan from a cultural perspective, and often follow the more successful football clubs. They alter their support for clubs more frequently. These circumstances are a risk for clubs since the new cosmopolitan fan could leave the club or sport as rapidly as he or she entered it (Giulianotti, 1999).

Thus, the new consumer is less loyal to the football club than the traditional supporter. A decrease of brand loyalty is a long term threat to an organization. Furthermore, Giulianotti (1999) states that the cosmopolitans enjoy the places that are created by the local people that sit still. Club identities are traditionally created by clubs together with their local supporters. If there are less of these traditional local supporters, then the club value that is co-produced by them becomes less. This decreases the heterogeneity of club identities and thus clubs are becoming more replaceable.

Identity

Concerning the satisfaction of supporters, the identity of a football club is very important since supporters must be able to identify with their club. Football clubs must have a positive brand identity in order to create and maintain a strong relationship between the club and the supporters.

The brands identity is what gives the brand meaning, what it stands for, and what makes it unique. (Melin, 2006). The brand identity can be altered and repositioned during time, for instance if the identity is unclear. According to Kapferer (in Melin, 2006) there has to be a strong relationship between the brand product and the customer, in order to create a strong identity for the brand. Gardner (2007, pp. 137) states that the identity is what creates the connection between the brand and the consumer. For marketing actions to become relevant it is needed that a clear identity and strong positioning is present. Regarding whether or not clubs are successful relies upon how the club`s image is perceived by both domestic and foreign fans (King, 2000).

2.4 Towards a model

Thus, summarizing:

In modern day professional football commercialization is necessary for clubs, since clubs need to generate revenue to stay competitive. Though, the change of clubs from sporting associations into commercialized business organizations, leads to opposition of the fan bases who are not content with the changing culture of the club. Furthermore, the most important characteristic of the membership club or supporter owned club is the large influence of supporters. They are able to successfully influence the commercialization strategy of their club, since the management of the club needs the approval of the fans.

As a result, and in relation to the findings in the literature, this leads to the following expectation:

Assumption 1:

Football clubs with a high level of supporter influence, have more satisfaction among supporters, than football clubs with a low level of supporter influence.

Additionally, I suspect that the supporters of football clubs disapprove of some commercial developments that could damage the traditional images, cultures and values of the club. This restricts to a certain degree the commercialization process and leads to the following expectation:

Assumption 2:

The commercial income of clubs with high supporter influence is less than of clubs with low supporter influence.

See figure 2, next page.

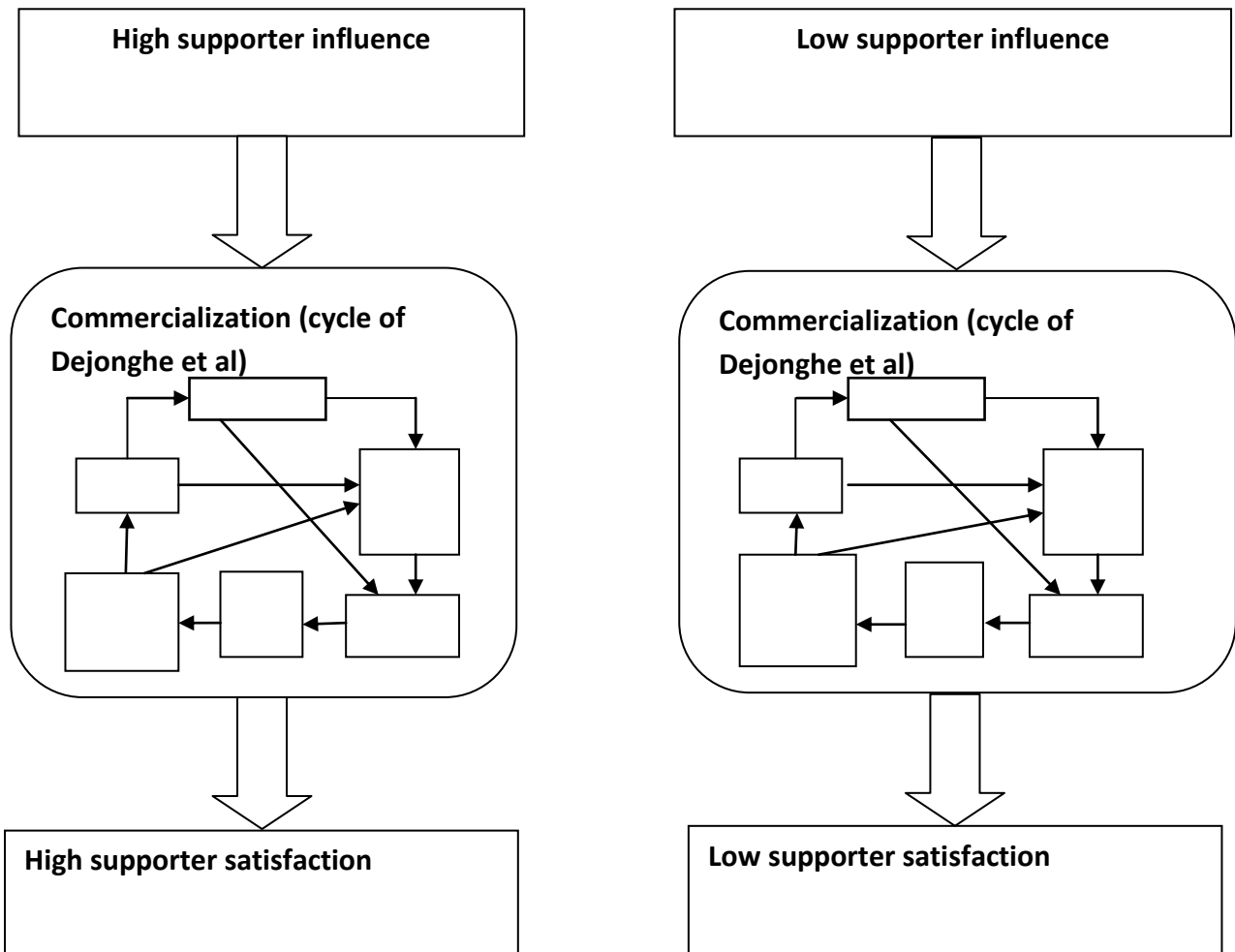


Figure 2: Commercialization and supporter contentment

3 Methodology

3.1 General

Chapter 1.5 incorporated a brief introduction on the used research method. This part features a more comprehensive description of the research approach. In this section the methodology will be discussed with the objective to provide insights on the approach that has been used and what particular steps have been taken in order to be able to answer the research question. The basis of this research is exploratory. The aim of an exploratory research is to find out what is happening and seeking new insights (Saunders et al., 2007). The research techniques of the exploratory research are very flexible, unstructured, and qualitative. Furthermore the researcher begins without firm preconceptions as to what will be found (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1995). These considerations are an advantage for this research assignment.

Regarding the performance of this research a qualitative data method is used. It consists of research of data from a wide range of sources, and analysis of this data by means of non-numerical procedures.

Main research question:

- *What is the difference in commercialization strategy between membership football clubs and non-membership football clubs and what effect does the commercialization strategy have on supporter satisfaction?*

In order to find answers to the research question, a multiple case study of football clubs is carried out. Multiple data sources are used, i.e. triangulation, in order to obtain more reliable results (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.2 Sample design

Case analysis limits the amount of organizations that can be analyzed within a reasonable timeframe and reasonable cost. Because there is lack of knowledge about the topic of research, it was decided to carry out the research by multiple cases. Using a single case would decrease the potential for knowledge creation and generalization. I decided to focus on three case clubs in this research. By focusing on three cases an in-depth analysis of each club is possible, and at the same time there is some relative diversity to enlarge the validity of the outcome. The objective is to acquire an understanding of the particular cases.

When working with large quantities of samples, random probability sampling is advised in order to increase generalizability. Though, in this research, only three sample cases are used. If the three cases would be selected in a completely random way, there is a risk that, in a diverse case population, three similar cases would be selected, that combined would not be

representative of the population. Therefore, the choice was made to use Purposive Sampling. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007), Purposive sampling enables the researcher to use his or her judgment to select cases that will best facilitate to answer the research question and to reach the objectives. This type of sampling is often used in research with very small samples like in case study research and when the researcher aspires to select cases that are specifically informative (Neuman, 2005).

The objective of this research is to compare membership football clubs with non membership football clubs. Therefore, the decision was made to select as cases: One membership club, one non-membership club and one partial membership club as an intermediate case.

Another criterion was to select three clubs from three different countries, instead of three clubs from one single country, in order to make the selection more representative for clubs in the world as a whole. Though, choosing clubs from different countries could bring a risk as the contexts of the clubs differ and therefore may explain differences as well. In order to minimize this risk it was decided to choose clubs from countries that are within the European Union and fall under the Uefa regulations. Clubs within the European Union and Uefa code share the same context to a certain degree.

The following clubs were selected as the research cases:

Manchester United, England. Manchester United ranks 3rd place on the Deloitte 2012 list of football clubs with the highest amount of revenue in the world (Deloitte, 2012). Because of these high revenue numbers, commercialization is most likely to be high at the club, and therefore it is argued to be a functional case selection. Manchester United is owned by American business entrepreneurs (The Glazer family) and therefore serves as the non-membership club in the case selection.

FC Barcelona, Spain. FC Barcelona holds the 2nd position on the Deloitte 2012 list of football clubs with the highest amount of revenue worldwide (Deloitte, 2012). Just like Manchester United, because of these large revenue numbers, commercialization is most likely to be high at FC Barcelona, and thus it is argued to be a functional case selection. FC Barcelona is owned by its supporters and therefore serves as the membership club in the case selection.

AFC Ajax, the Netherlands. For the 3rd case it was decided to select an intermediate case: A football club where supporters are only partly in control, in other words a partial membership club. AFC Ajax was selected as this intermediate case. At AFC Ajax supporters and business entrepreneurs are both evenly in control. The club does not feature in the top 10 of Deloitte's 2012 most revenue clubs list. However, AFC Ajax is the richest club of the Netherlands and is historically a very successful club in the world with a very distinctive traditional football culture. As a result, there is a high possibility of a clash of commercialism and traditional football culture.

Another reason to select Manchester United, FC Barcelona and AFC Ajax is that they are among the most popular clubs in Europe. They are influential; many other clubs follow them.

3.3 Data collection

During the design of the research method, the alternatives of two data collection methods were evaluated: Interviews/questionnaires and desk research (secondary data collection).

Alternative 1: Interviews, general description. Yin (1994) states the following strengths and weaknesses as regards the use of interviews: Strengths: Targeted: focuses directly on study topics. Insightful: provides perceived causal inferences. Weakness: Bias due to poor constructed questionnaires. Response bias. Inaccuracies due to poor recall. Reflexivity: interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear.

Alternative 2: Desk research (secondary data collection), general description. Yin (1994) states regarding documentation: Strengths: Stable: can be reviewed repeatedly. Unobtrusive: not created as a result of the case. Exact: contains exact names, references and details of an event. Broad coverage: long span of time, many events and many settings. Weakness: Retrievability: can be low. Biased selectivity: If collection is incomplete. Reporting bias: reflects (unknown) bias of author. Access: may be deliberately blocked. And regarding archival records Yin (1994) states: Strengths: (Same as above for documentation). Precise and quantitative. Weakness: (Same as above for documentation). Accessibility due to privacy reasons.

Evaluation of the methods in correspondence to the research subject

After the data collection methods were defined in general, the next step was to evaluate which data collection method had the best fit to the research. In a research circumstance that is characterized by a lack of available data, the use of interviews is more appropriate. Though, in the conditions of this research subject, there is a large amount of data available. Furthermore, when performing interviews there is a large risk of biased results. The problem of biased outcomes also exists in the use of documentation, articles and reports. However, by using multiple sources of evidence (triangulation), this problem can be significantly decreased. Also, the question is: Who to interview? When interviewing clubs, chances are high that club respondents attempt to communicate a positive picture about their club. In other words, the objectivity of the club itself is low, considering the fact that it aims to market itself in a positive light. Another alternative could be to interview club fans, however this approach as well has its problems and limitations. According to Stewart & Kamins (1993) secondary data is likely to be higher quality data than could be collected by researchers on their own. Secondary data is often gathered by professionals, skilled researchers and research institutions, what typically means high quality of data. The disadvantages of secondary data can be overcome by assessing data sources more comprehensively and carefully (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

Therefore, after the strengths and weaknesses were assessed in consideration to the research topic, it was decided to collect the data by means of secondary data collection (documentation, archival records etc).

The following main data sources were used in this assignment:

- The official websites of the clubs involved.
- Club official Year Accounts.
- International football news websites (FIFA, UEFA,KNVB, VI, BBC Football etc).
- Football research publications (Deloitte, Forbes etc).
- National newspapers (The Guardian, The Independent, El Pais, Marca, NRC, Volkskrant etc).
- Institution publications and reports.
- Books concerning the subject.
- Scientific journals and articles.

The internet makes available important access to relevant information in the form of online books, journal articles and research papers. Journal articles frequently present concise, up-to-date source of information for research, and because all reputable journals are refereed there is relative security about the accuracy and relevance of the data published. Books can yield extraordinarily detailed information, but concern should be taken to make sure that the information has not become out of date.

3.4 Measurement of the variables of the model

Measuring supporter satisfaction

I argue that the dissatisfaction of supporters leads to supporter protests, action campaigns against the club, and other signs of supporter disapproval in the media. Therefore, the satisfaction of supporters is measured by the amount and nature of these indicators: Supporter protest, action campaigns, other signs of supporter disapproval in the media. This data is found in two stages by examining the news in the media: The news in newspapers/tv and the news found on other websites via the internet search engine website Google.

Stage one:

First, a list was compiled of the largest newspapers of the countries and the largest sports television organization of each country:

- Spain: Marca (tv), El Pais, El Mundo, ABC, AS.
- The Netherlands: NOS (tv), Telegraaf, Volkskrant, NRC, AD.
- England: BBC (tv), The Guardian, The Times, The Mirror, The Independent.

The data was gathered by searching on the newspaper and sports tv organization websites on key words such as 'supporters', 'protest', 'action campaign', 'football fans' etc. For the Spanish and Dutch websites the Spanish and Dutch translated keywords were used.

Stage two:

Subsequently, other internet websites data was gathered by searching on the search engine website Google.com. In the data search process on Google.com the same keywords were used. In the Google search process data from a diverse amount of websites was found. The websites that contained the data were checked on their credibility. When the credibility of the website was unsure, the information was not used or the attempt was made to find the information on other internet websites.

Measuring commercialization

Commercialization was measured as following:

- Level and evolution of total revenue of clubs.
- Level and evolution of commercial revenue of clubs.

For Manchester United and FC Barcelona yearly data regarding the different types of revenues is available by investigating the yearly reports of Deloitte. The reports of Deloitte do not include Ajax, however similar data is found by investigating the Annual Reports of Ajax. In the football publications of Deloitte and in the Annual Reports of Ajax, the revenues of football clubs are split in three categories: matchday, broadcast and commercial sources. Commercial sources include sponsorship and merchandising revenues. Therefore, in order to measure the commercialization of clubs, the level and evolution of revenue out of commercial sources is examined.

One could argue that all revenues of football clubs have a relationship to commercialization. Therefore, also the level and evolution of total revenues is investigated.

3.5 General data analysis

The investigation of the data results will first be performed by a within case analysis for each firm. Within case analysis includes comprehensive write ups of the cases. The objective is to get accustomed with the case as an individual entity in order to indentify the unique patterns of each case, before generalization across cases is performed (Eisenhardt, 1989).

When this is completed a cross case analysis will be performed in order to compare individual case results with each other. The cross case analysis incorporates the systematic search for cross case patterns (Voss et al, 2002, p. 214) which go further than each individual case`s context and raise the generalizability of the observations (Eisenhardt, 1989).

When the aggregation of all the found data regarding the commercial strategies and supporter protests was completed, the data was analyzed. In the analysis process, data reduction is important. Hence, the less important material is removed. The most important material is selected, organized and transformed in such a way that conclusions can be derived. Miles & Huberman (1994) state regarding data reduction:

“Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions. Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified.”

3.6 Within case analysis

The objective of the within case analysis is to examine how the case clubs commercialize and what issues occur concerning their fan bases. This analysis is split in several parts.

General

The case analysis starts with a short club description.

Ownership

The case clubs have been selected based on their ownership (membership vs non-membership). Therefore, the ownership in short is already known. However, this part of the analysis aimed to get a more detailed description of the ownership structure (or in other words: Level of supporter influence).

Commercialization

In this part the commercial strategies of the clubs are investigated. This section describes the commercial strategy, development, club statements and actions of the case clubs. The structure of the analyses of the cases is for the most part the same. However, every football club is unique and has its own unique culture and strategies. Therefore, the structure of this commercialization description may vary slightly among the three case clubs in order to highlight the unique results. Though, the general structure was set up as following:

- First, a revenue numbers summary
- Next, a description of commercial developments, commercial strategy, club statements, sponsorship and other commercial actions.
- Concluding, the Corporate Social Responsibility policy of the case clubs.

Supporter problems

When the commercial club characteristics are identified, the subsequent section investigates the problems with supporters that as a result have occurred. This part follows the same approach. The data that is gathered regarding the actions of the club`s supporters, is reduced so that the most important elements remain. Furthermore, fan problems that are

not related to club commercialization, are removed, since they are not relevant to the research subject.

3.7. Cross case analysis

After the case analysis has been completed, the next step was to compare the cases with each other. First, the comparative results of the cross case analysis are summarized in a table. Subsequently, the results are explained in the sections 'Commercialization strategy comparison' and 'Supporter satisfaction'.

Commercialization strategy comparison

In this section the commercial approaches and philosophies of the case clubs that were found in the within case analysis, are compared with each other. In the comparison process, differences and similarities were explored.

Then, revenue numbers of the case clubs were compared. This in order to answer assumption 2 of the model and to get an understanding of what the club commercial strategies imply for the generation of total (commercial) revenue.

Supporter satisfaction

In this part the levels of supporter protests among the case clubs are compared. This was also performed in order to address assumption 1 of the model. In order to determine the satisfaction among the case clubs, not only the quantity of protests was investigated but also the character of the protests.

Concluding, the results and effects of unsatisfied supporters were described in combination with the theory.

4. Within case analysis

4.1 Case 1: Manchester United

General

The English Manchester United Football Club (MUFC) is a very successful club in football. It was established in 1878 as Newton Heath LYR Football Club, and in 1902 decided to alter its name to Manchester United. Its prizes include 19 English top division league titles and 3 European Cup/Champions League titles (1968, 1999, 2008).

Club ownership

Manchester United is structured as a business company with a limited amount of owners in control. There is no form of member ownership at the club.

Business has always played a role at Manchester United. By as early as 1902, business and football had become inseparable in England (Fundinguniverse, 2012). Sporting events were sponsored by local businessmen and newspaper publishers, while entrepreneurs organized clubs as limited companies. In 2005 the Glazer family, large North-American entrepreneurs, purchased Manchester United and de-listed it from the stock exchange (Reuters, 2012). The Glazer family carried out a 'leveraged' buyout of the club. They borrowed the money to purchase the club and after the acquisition moved an important amount of the debt on the balance sheet of the club. The future revenues of Manchester United are utilized to finance their own acquirement of the club. Considering that Manchester United used to have a reputation for having no debts, this development was an important change.

Commercialization

At the start of the commercial strategy analysis, first a revenue outline in numbers.

| Manchester United revenue outline. Data gathered from Deloitte reports (2005; 2012) | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
| Net total income/revenue | 367 m E | 259.0 m E |
| Matchday | 120.3 m E | 92.4 m E |
| Commercial | 114.5 m E | 72.1 m E |
| Broadcasting | 132.2 m E | 94.5 m E |

Table 1: Revenue breakdown Manchester United

At the start of the 1990s commercial activities accelerated at the club. In 1991 it was the first British football organization to float on the London Stock Exchange. In 1993, Manchester United Football Club plc raised its operating profit and turnover significantly, largely due to merchandising and brand extensions such as 'Champs Cola'. The club imagined that selling the brand was a more stable source of revenue than depending on winning football matches on a consistent basis (Fundinguniverse, 2012). In 1994 a Megastore was launched at the club's ground Old Trafford. The ground itself was as well largely upgraded for £13 million. By the end of the 90's the club was in a large capital contract with electronics company Sharp. Also, together with the other English clubs, United had a five year £743 million broadcasting

contract with BSkyB and the BBC. The club carried on entering new areas for commercial exploitation purposes. An online store sponsored by Lotus and Sun Microsystems was established in the late 90's. And the club opted for strategies to gain more popularity in Asia.

Since 2005, the brand value of the club has more than doubled (BrandFinance, 2012), and the club is now classed as the "most valuable sporting team in the world" (Forbes, 2012). According to BrandFinance (2011) the Glazer Family has utilized their marketing experience in the American football business, by applying a strategy of "on field performance underpins financial success" at Manchester United. Since the acquirement of the club by the Glazer family, with the aim of to cover their debt payments, ticket prices at the Old Trafford stadium have increased even more. More and more traditional supporters of United, who have low budgets, cannot afford anymore to attend matches of their club. This decreases the traditional core of support that drives the atmosphere at the stadium. The new higher income fans visit the stadium more for the event than for the affection of the team. They are in the stadium more to be entertained than to support their team (Hamil, 2008).

At current, commercial deals are extensive at Manchester United, with the club currently having more than 20 worldwide partners who pay large amounts of money to be affiliated with the club (Deloitte, 2011). Manchester United has a reputation for being Europe's most innovative club regarding the expansion of its commercial strategy. And it is also the most profitable. One of the objectives of the club is "Treating fans as customers". This is also stated in the Annual report of the club (2011).

The principal sponsor of Manchester United is Aon. Aon is a global provider of risk management, insurance and reinsurance brokerage, and human resources solutions and outsourcing services. Clothing sponsor: Nike. Other sponsors: DHL, Chevrolet, BWIN, Singha etc. Product merchandize is extensive.

In 2012 the club signed a 5 year sponsorship agreement with American automotive company Chevrolet. The logo of Chevrolet will be visible on several attributes of the club, including signs, scoreboards, player benches, backdrops and chairs in interviews. The collaboration intends to bring Chevrolet's fans "closer" to the club. Commercial director, Richard Arnold, states that aligning with an American automotive partner and the increasing popularity of football in America, hopefully makes it possible to increase the club's fan base in the country (Marketing Week, 2012).

The club has an official TV channel, MUTV, which is accessible as a subscription service (£6 or €8/month). It broadcasts exclusive documentaries, players interviews, the manager's weekly press conference, match analysis, as well as other issues. The TV channel is obtainable around the world on diverse TV channels. Besides MUTV there is also MUTV Online, which is a highlight service that can be viewed on the pc. MUTV Online consists of interviews, news and match highlights (Manutd, 2012).

Even though commercialism is extensive at the club, Manchester United is careful about exploitation in social media. Manchester United has embraced the use of social media. But, according to marketing head Jonathan Rigby (Marketing Week, 2011) the club was late into social media and was worried about how to deal with social media as a football organization. Manchester United established a Facebook site but the club is cautious about too much commercialization on Facebook. It has determined not to have sponsored links down the right hand side or any Manchester United commercial statements. Rigby: "We don't sell off Facebook and are resisting until we are satisfied it will not mess up the growth of the Facebook page. Our big concern is that if we get it wrong that the fan base will stop growing." The club does not make use of Twitter because of similar motivations. Rigby: "There will be no official Twitter site until we have satisfied ourselves that we have determined a role for Twitter." However, recently, the club has opened its own social network (Thenextweb, 2011). The club took a big step by launching its own complete social network, aimed at its worldwide viewers.

Regarding its Corporate Social Responsibility values (Mufoundation, 2011), Manchester United aspires to be the best football club globally, both on and off the pitch. The success of the club should not just be determined by the amount of prizes it wins, but also by the impact it has on the community in which it is situated. The club aims to be a part of the community in the widest sense. Environmental and social issues at regional, national and international level are addressed by the club and the Manchester United brand is used to leverage support and generate consciousness of the issues in front of the world. The club established the MU Foundation, which has the goal of educating, motivating and inspiring future generations to build better communities for all. It works on five areas: Football, Community cohesion, Health, Education and Charities.

Supporter problems

The first stage, the data search process on newspaper/tv websites, delivered numerous data results. The second stage, consisting of data search via search engine Google, delivered many results as well. In this section, the findings, with reference to several of the websites, are described.

Supporters have held various action campaigns against the increasing stock market plans of the club. (TheMirror, 2012). Many Manchester United fans view the stock market flotation, as well as other things, as negatively. By some it is seen as the negative symbol of the commodification, gentrification and globalization of football (Edensor & Millington, 2008). The approach of "Treating fans as customers" has many critics as well. Some supporters state that being a supporter of Manchester United is 'to engage in an act of consumerism ... to select a quality product ... that has been extensively marketed nationally and globally' (Hand, 2001: 109).

Supporters of Manchester United have been protesting for a long time against the increasing stadium ticket prices at the club. In the last years of economic recession, many teams have reduced or stabilized season-ticket prices since supporters were not able to buy stadium tickets anymore. Though, at Manchester United ticket prices continued to increase even in these difficult societal economic times, since the club owners had the objective of increasing profits. This increased the level of protests of Manchester United fans (TheGuardian, 2010).

Creation of a breakaway club

The business approach of the club and the Glazer take over has led to a lot of opposition among Manchester United fans (TheTimes, 2010). For example, a campaign resulted in several thousand fans creating a breakaway club, FC United (BBC, 2005). FC United now plays amateur football and is set up to have a more authentic supporter culture.

Manchester United Supporters' Trust

In England, a supporters' trust is a formal, democratic organization of supporters who aim to increase the influence of supporters on the management of their club. The Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) has a membership of over 175,000, and is the biggest supporters' trust in England. The members of MUST aspire to be able to group their finances to acquire a significant stake in the club if the chance occurs in the future (MUST, 2012). MUST makes protests against the Glazer owners and aims to communicate a clear statement that without the support and buying power of the supporters, the worldwide strength of the Manchester United brand does not really exist. MUST has had debates with three separate organizations looking to purchase the club from the Glazers and changing the standard of football club ownership in England by putting the club in the hands of the supporters. The concept is working well at Real Madrid and Barcelona and MUST hopes Manchester United will follow the example of these clubs in this way.

The commercialization of football affects the fan opinion and the general public opinion of clubs. For instance, has the general opinion of Manchester United changed over time? The foundation of the worldwide Manchester United brand was established in the 1950s when Matt Busby led the club (Andrews, 2004). The club won several English national league titles with exciting football in this period. Then, on 6 February 1958, an airplane with the team in it crashed. 23 players and journalists didn't survive. It was a horrific disaster, but because of this tragedy the club received massive respect, sympathy and public affection. This resulted in a large increase in the popularity of Manchester United. This sympathy increased even more when Matt Busby managed to rebuild the team winning two English league titles and the European cup in 1968. Nowadays, Manchester United is often criticized by its own fans, and fans of other clubs, for the way it has turned into a business company. For instance, see figure 3, fans of rivals Manchester City mocked United by making modifications of the Manchester United logo (The Guardian, 2006). Though it was parody, it illustrates the view

that United is a highly commercialized business company. It appears that the club has lost some of its sympathy.



Figure 3: Manchester United mocking by Manchester City fans

4.2 Case 2: FC Barcelona

General

Spanish football club FC Barcelona was founded in 1899 by Joan Gamper with assistance from Catalans and foreigners. Catalan culture is important at the club (Fcbarcelona, 2012a), hence the motto "*Més que un club*" (More than a club). The club has won the Spanish league 21 times and the European Cup/Champions league 4 times (1992, 2006, 2009 and 2011).

Club ownership

An essential characteristic of FC Barcelona is that it was originated as a membership club (Annual Report FC Barcelona, 2011). This is a sharp distinction with most top football clubs, Manchester United for instance, that are owned by local business people of industrial families. Now in the 21st century this is still the case, with the club attaining a total global membership of 145000 in 2006. The name for the members is "socios". Every member pays a yearly membership fee that lets them, among other things, vote in the presidential elections of the club. These fees are an important source of revenue for the club and president Laporta recognized it as holding opportunities for considerable revenue expansion in the future. Because of this membership structure, in contrast to most other clubs in the world, Barcelona really replicates the wishes and desires of its supporters. The club's members can also vote on topics such as the permission of shirt sponsorship, which has occurred in the past (Fcbarcelona, 2012b).

Commercialization

At the start of the commercial strategy analysis, first a revenue outline in numbers.

| FC Barcelona revenue outline. Data gathered from Deloitte reports (2005; 2012) | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
| Net total income/revenue | 450.7 m E | 169.2 m E |
| Match day | 110.7 m E | 57.8 m E |
| Commercial | 156.3 m E | 45.3 m E |
| Broadcasting | 183.7 m E | 66.1 m E |

Table 2: Revenue breakdown FC Barcelona

Barca, under president Joan Laporta (2003-now), has been successful to market the club worldwide while staying loyal to its sociopolitical background. FC Barcelona, with its 'More than a club' motto, represents the culture of Catalonia, while at the same time being one of the worldwide largest sporting brands. In their positioning the clubs tries to stay away from the wildly commercial reputation that many English clubs, i.e. Manchester United, are known for (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). Barca states the objective to raise revenue should be performed without decreasing the members' social and democratic rights.

However, just like other top clubs, Barcelona has a very commercial strategy. The club is aware of the requirement to work in the worldwide market. It increased commercial activities and has been extensively attracting markets like Asia (Annual report FC Barcelona, 2011). The difference with other clubs is that Barca's commercial strategy is founded on strong cultural and social principles. It continues the traditions of Barcelona, like member democracy and corporate social responsibility. According to Hamil, Walters & Watson (2010) in the Barcelona strategy it looks like the aspects of member democracy, commercial strategy, corporate social responsibility and success on the field influence each other positively. Barcelona markets itself globally as the personification of sporting excellence and cultural refinement.

Currently, the main sponsors/partners of the club are Nike and Qatar foundation. Other sponsors/premium partners: Audi, Turkish Airlines, Estrella Damm, La Caixa, TV3 Catalunya. Product merchandize can be described as extensive.

FC Barcelona has an official television channel. Barca TV provides information about the club and entertainment. Barca TV is provided worldwide by pay-per-view channel on satellite and cable networks. Since 2008 Barca TV is broadcasted for free in Catalunya in order to "bring it further into live with the needs and desires of the club's members and supporters" (Barcatv, 2012).

Unlike most other top clubs, Barca does not maximize ticket prices to prices the market would bear (Annual report FC Barcelona, 2010). The Barca Board is required to be accountable and remain popular with the supporters. As a result ticket pricing at Barca is low

in comparison to other top clubs. By doing so Barca does not exploit the loyalty of its supporters.

One of the traits of the brand identity of the club is enclosed in the appearance of Barca itself instead of star players (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). The transfer policy is founded on the Catalan asset of shrewd financial management. At Barcelona there is no free spending like there is at clubs like Real Madrid. Barcelona uses an economic approach to buying players who however have a fine reputation. The most important is the team, instead of a group of world stars. This is an attribute of the culture of Catalonia. A trait of the positioning of Barcelona is that it does not aim to have a glamorous image.

At the finish of the 2005/2006 season, Barcelona was the only top club globally that did not have a sponsor's logo on its shirts. At first sight this appears to be unprofessional, considering the miss of a large quantity of revenue. However, Barcelona is giving a powerful sociopolitical statement, that has large value and increases brand equity, by not having a business logo on its shirt (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). It strengthens the social responsible brand image of Barca; at Barcelona community, solidarity and care are important.

Since 2006, the shirts featured the logo of Unicef (Unicef, 2012), emphasizing the objective of both organizations to address the problems of children in vulnerable situations. Barcelona receives no payment from this relationship. Barcelona donates 1.5 million euro yearly to Unicef.

More than other clubs, FC Barcelona is using new media and social media to reach potential consumers. The new media strategy of the club is focused on websites like Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, as well as the supply of phone apps.

Barcelona's business intelligence manager, Pasi Lankinen (BBC, 2012), states:

“Communicating values is more long-term, talking about what we are and making more loyal fans, so that when you stop winning then something stays and they don't move to the next team that is winning.”

As part of the commercial strategy, the club has decreased the threshold of consumption, meaning the financial level at which supporters buy something. In the past the first purchase of fans was for example a shirt, but nowadays the first instance of commercial contact can be a FC Barcelona app with a price of only 75 cents. And after that, the fan can be taken to the following commercial consumption point. Just like other clubs, FC Barcelona attempts to lead people to the club's own website and apps, or to the websites of the club's sponsors, in order to create a sale.

Another commercial asset is symbolized in the ground of the club. The Camp Nou stadium has an enormous attraction to people. The FC Barcelona museum and the stadium tour attract more than 1.3 million visitors on a yearly basis, which makes it the most popular tour of the city (Campnou.nl).

FC Barcelona communicates its corporate social responsibility with the FC Barcelona Foundation. The projects of the FC Barcelona Foundation are created founded on premises like for instance, the promotion of education and the positive values of sport, and the development of Catalonia by use of FC Barcelona (Foundation, 2012).

Since the year 2006 FC Barcelona has been conformed to the 'Millennium Development Goals' of the United Nations and gives 0.7% of the revenues from FC Barcelona to the Foundation for its projects. Since 2010, the playing squad and the training personnel from the professional areas of the club are also giving some of their income. They grant 0.5 % of their salary to the Foundation.

Supporter problems

Both stages of the data search process, the newspaper/tv and the Google search process, delivered only a few results. Protests of supporters against the commercial strategy of the club were not found. There are not many problems with supporters at FC Barcelona.

In the past, there have been issues with supporters. From 1978-2000 the president was Nunez. He tried to transform Barca from a members' club to a company, but he experienced a lot of resistance from the fans (Hamil, Walters & Watson, 2010). In fact he was very unpopular among the Barca fans. The opposition formation L'elefant Blau, with Joan Laporta, was afraid that the identity and aim of the club was developing to an entertainment model in American style. L'elefant Blau wanted to redefine Barca's identity as most importantly a sporting and cultural institution where the most important asset are the fans.

An area that could cause problems in the future is the stadium of the club. According to El Mundo Deportivo the FC Barcelona management is seriously considering to leave the stadium Camp Nou (Insidespanishfootball.com, 2012). The Camp Nou stadium needs to be renovated, but this process would have huge costs. The chairman of the club, Sandro Rosell, is considering building a new multipurpose stadium. The new building complex would also incorporate a hotel, restaurant, cinema and theater. With this plan much more revenue could be made than currently is the case. Many supporters object such a move since it's a purely income-driven decision that harms the club culture (Campnou.nl, 2012). The popularity of Camp Nou is huge and it is a strong part of the club tradition. Supporters groups state that FC Barcelona should cherish its stadium and find other commercial ways to increase revenue.

4.3 Case 3: AFC Ajax

General

AFC Ajax was founded in 1900 and named after the legendary Greek hero. The club has an important history and is one of the most successful European clubs of the 20th century. The club won the Dutch league title 31 times and the European Cup/Champions League 4 times (1971, 1972, 1973, 1995).

Club ownership

The organization of Ajax is set up as a combination of a membership club and a business company (Coronel, 2008). Membership influence is considered important, but due to the commercialization of the game the organization of Ajax has incorporated many attributes of a business company. The organization structure of Ajax consists of a club and a company ('Vennootschap/NV'). The club has an Administration ('Bestuur') and a Member Council ('Ledenraad'), which represents the members. The Member Council consists of 24 delegates, who represent the members. Currently, Ajax has 850 members in total and 650 of these members are qualified to vote. The Ajax NV consists of a Management ('Directie') and a Board of Commissioners ('Raad van Commissarissen'). The Board of Commissioners has appointed the Management. The Member Council is able to dismiss the Administration. The Board of Commissioners can be dismissed by the shareholders. 73 % of the shares are possessed by the club, thus the members, represented by the Member Council are able to dismiss the Board of Commissioners and also the Management (NOS, 2012). Concluding, the members have a lot of influence at Ajax. However, it is very difficult to become a member of Ajax. The members are selected by the club Ajax.

Commercialization

At the start of the commercial strategy analysis, first a revenue outline in numbers.

| AFC Ajax revenue outline. Data gathered from Ajax annual reports (2004; 2011) | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
| Net total turnover | 97.1 m E | 64.2 m E |
| Sponsoring turnover | 28.9 m E | 17.8 m E |
| Merchandising turnover | 9.3 m E | 5.8 m E |

Table 3: Revenue breakdown AFC Ajax

In the past Ajax was a sports club managed by amateurs/business people. During time it has transformed into a professional organization that is listed, led by a professional managing board controlled by a board of commissioners. Since 1998, Ajax is located on the stock exchange market. Only 10% of all its shares are freely transferable. The remainder is possessed for the largest part, 73 %, by the club Ajax. A part from the one time capital injection, the stock market launch IPO of Ajax in 1998 has not given the club financial added value. The commission Coronel advised in 2008 to exit from the stock market (Coronel,

2008). However, when in 2008 the stock markets collapsed worldwide, the management of Ajax decided it was not the right time for an exit. One of the greatest and most influential players and coaches of Ajax is Johan Crujff. He is strongly affiliated to the club and has an important advice role. According to his vision there are too many commercially minded people coming out of the corporate business industry in the Ajax organization. He opts for more ex-footballers in the organization. Johan Crujff wants international top experts to screen the organization of the club, to elevate it to a higher level (AD, 2012). He stated: "The experts can compare the situation at Ajax with the situation for example of Manchester United, which is a company. Or with the situation of Barcelona, which is a members club. Or with the situation of Bayern Munchen, which is a mixture of Manchester United and Barcelona. I think the organization at Ajax is mostly comparable to Bayern Munchen. Therefore I am curious what the specialists will conclude."

Since 2008, the main sponsor of Ajax is AEGON. The insurance company AEGON has a prominent place on the official match outfit of all teams of Ajax. The main clothing sponsor is Adidas. Adidas produces the Ajax clothing. Other sponsors include: Mercedes-Benz, BDO, Hublot, CSU, Oger, Sony, C1000, Verwelius. Ajax has an extensive range of skyboxes and business seats. Product merchandize is extensive.

Ajax has an official television channel. For a subscription payment, the channel provides exclusive video material, season overviews, videos behind the scenes, profiles of players and specials etc (Ajax, 2012). In 1996, Ajax moved from its old ground 'De Meer' to the new ground 'Amsterdam Arena' with more than 50.000 spectator capacity. The new stadium opened up many new business opportunities for the club.

What distinguishes Ajax from other clubs in the world is its youth academy and the way the club is commercially exploiting it. The youth academy of Ajax is world famous. It is one of the greatest brand names. During history, the Ajax academy has delivered a long list of world class players. From the 1970s successful Ajax team to the 1995 successful Ajax team, youth players coming out the academy have always played a big role. Many football enthusiasts in the world became a fan of Ajax because of this unique asset. In this time, Ajax continues to invest a lot in the youth academy with a yearly budget of 4.5 million euro (FIFA, 2007). The fact that commercialism has increased at Ajax has not declined the club's emphasis on its youth academy. In addition to sustaining the strength of its academy, Ajax is exploiting this asset. In 2011, Ajax agreed on a five year partnership with All Star Consultancy from Greece to set up Ajax academies in Greece: The launch of the Ajax Hellas Youth Academy. From the base camp on the Greek island Corfu, on 15 locations in Greece academies will be set up that are founded on the Ajax training philosophy. The Ajax Hellas Youth Academy accommodates several hundreds of Greek football talents who will be trained by local coaches in the Ajax fashion, with the support of Ajax. The Greeks state that Ajax is worldwide known due to their unique youth academy (Ajax, 2011). In 2010, Ajax made an agreement with Russian football club Zhemchuzhina-Sochi to bring the ideas of the Ajax youth academy to the

Russian club (AD, 2010). In the arrangement Ajax will obtain 1 million euro every year from Zhemchuzhina-Sochi in return for the transfer of the knowledge of the Ajax youth academy. The contract is set up for a period of five years, with an option for an extra five years. The Russian club is building a copy of the Ajax youth complex 'De Toekomst'.

In 2010 Ajax launched the Ajax Online Academy (Ajax, 2010). With the online Academy, Ajax wants to further reinforce its image as a youth training institute and exploit the knowledge. The Ajax Online Academy is a complete, didactic and methodologically constructed football training program. It consists of a training module for teams. It also includes an individual training module, which is focused on the football player. The team's version is aimed at coaches and it has to be paid for. Youth coaches are provided with support and guidance in football training. On the website, www.ajaxonlineacademy.com, coaches can watch Ajax exercises and compose their own training. The data of the coaches is stored under their own account, so each coach is able to build an own collection of training.

Ajax is aiming to be present internationally and this way hopes to organically develop attraction for its 1st team. Ajax director of business development Marcus Keane explains: "In the long run, if you solidify your brand, it will be good for Ajax in all sorts of ways. This is branding, but with substance"(ESPN, 2011). As a result, Ajax believes its shirt sales, sponsorship and the worth of its broadcasting rights will increase in the long term.

Ajax is very active regarding Corporate Social Responsibility. The club has created the Ajax Foundation. The Ajax Foundation covers the charities that Ajax supports in the social field. Ajax thinks it is very important to support social projects in the field of Sport and Health, Education and Social Integration. Besides its own projects, the Ajax Foundation supports initiatives of other organizations for various charities. The Ajax Foundation wants to encourage solidarity and positively influence football and life skills in an involved, sympathetic and respectful way, without commercial purposes.

Supporter problems

The first newspaper/tv search stage delivered various fan protest results. The second Google search stage delivered many results as well. The results are described in this section.

The commercialization of the club led to aversion among many supporters. The club began to present itself as Ajax NV (limited liability company), spoke to shareholders and created a "customer service" department. In 2001 that department was renamed to "supporters business", because the supporters did not want to be customers of Ajax (NRC, 2008). Also, the ticket prices are too high according to many Ajax fans. The supporters of "Vak 410" are in action for healthy ticket prices that are affordable for every citizen (SoccerNews, 2010). The Amsterdam Arena stadium offers many business opportunities, but it is often heard that the new stadium lacks the warm atmosphere of the old De Meer stadium (NRC, 2008).

The increased commercialization has led to a cold distant relationship with supporters, sponsors and other stakeholders. The supporters think that the Ajax organization is managed in an inwards way and the managing board communicates in a cold unresponsive manner. Basically, the supporters feel they are not taken seriously enough (Coronel, 2008).

At Ajax there have been significant problems of control and power of the club in which the supporters played an important role. In 2010, Johan Crujff, an incredible influential former player and trainer of the club, stated “This is not Ajax anymore” (NOS, 2012). He wanted to reform the club to its classic football values. In the dialogue that followed in 2011 between the technical workgroup of Crujff and the club management a crisis emerged. Because of the large popularity of Crujff among the Ajax fans, the board and RVC members of Ajax decided to resign, because they felt they had no support among the fans anymore (Telegraaf, 2011). Now, the club tries to find a new balance between being a professional business organization and a football club that retains its club culture.

Supporters have complained that the Ajax management only thinks about making money (Volkskrant, 2007). Many fans are not content with the current logo of the club that was created because of commercial purposes. There have been action campaigns with the purpose of re-establishing the old logo. They have held campaigns under names like ‘Give Ajax its face back’ in order to restore the old classic logo of the club. The board of Ajax has responded they will not reintroduce the classic logo. Instead they will replace the current logo with a newer logo that has some features of the classic logo (AjaxNu, 2005). Another main complaint of Ajax fans is the influence of clothing sponsor Adidas on the shirt. Among the supporters there is a lot of argument and discomfort around the three Adidas stripes on the Ajax shirt. The Ajax shirt now incorporates the Adidas stripes that are typical of the sponsor. One of the main supporter sites states: “The three stripes do not belong on the Ajax shirt. It erodes the culture of the club and its traditions” (Parool, 2009). According to the board of Ajax it is purely a matter of money. They state that the club needs money and the three stripes on the shirt deliver the club more revenue. Supporter’s organization AFCA states that the face and image of the club have suffered too much. By having a dialogue with the club directors, sponsor Adidas and a representative of players and trainers, the fans hope to gain more influence on the design of the shirt.

Many Ajax supporters have protested against what they refer to as “modern football”. The supporters are not content with the modern day situation of football in general. They state that football has become too serious and commercial and they protest against issues like Pay TV and the UEFA. According to them the only thing that should be important is football itself (Ajaxshowtime, 2011).

5. Cross Case analysis

5.1 General

The individual cases have been investigated. The next step is to compare the individual case results with each other. To start, the compared results are summarized in a table:

| | M. United | FC Barcelona | AFC Ajax |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Supporter influence | Lowest | Highest | Intermediate |
| Commercial strategy | Corporate business style | Traditional football identity style | Mixed corporate/football |
| (Commercial) revenue amount | Intermediate | Highest | Lowest |
| Level of supporter satisfaction | Lowest | Highest | Intermediate |

Table 4: Cross case results

Next, an explanation of these results will be given. First a comparative analysis is made regarding the commercialization strategies of the cases and a revenue comparison. Second, the supporter satisfaction findings are compared between the cases.

5.2 Commercialization strategy comparison

When investigating the commercialization strategy results of the three case clubs, two different approaches were found in this research. I name the strategy of Manchester United a corporate business approach, while I name the strategy of FC Barcelona a traditional football identity approach. AFC Ajax has an intermediate mixed strategy with elements of both the aforementioned.

The corporate business approach: The incorporation of business principles in the football organization in order to exploit the market/environment to directly maximize revenues.

The traditional football identity approach: The construction of a traditional football identity to attract fans and thereby indirectly maximizing revenues. Most football clubs have social origins. They are organizations that were established as entertainment/sport by people for people; they served the needs of the community. In the traditional football identity approach the community aspect is considered the most important.

According to Brand Finance (2011) Manchester United applies a strategy of “on field performance underpins financial success”. Thus, buying the best players leads to sport success, which leads to financial profit which subsequently can be investing again in better players. This strategy shows a fit with the cycle model of Dejonghe et al (2010). The

commercial strategy of the club can be characterized as focusing on maximizing revenues from all sources. Not everything is about business at Manchester United: The club aspires a good relationship with its supporters and community, as illustrated by its CSR community projects and policy. But compared to the other two case clubs in this research, the strategy of Manchester United is the most corporate business like. It looks at its supporters as an important source of income. This is illustrated in the annual reports of the club. At Manchester United, "Converting fans into customers" is one of the four core strategies (MU Annual Report, 2003). The club is aiming to have a consumer relationship with its fans. At Manchester United, the main focus is on the right side of the model of Dejonghe et al (see Figure 1). The club aims to maximize revenues by establishing large contracts with sponsors, treating fans like customers by extensive merchandizing and high match day ticket prices and the securing, collectively with the other clubs in the English Premier League, of large broadcasting contracts with media enterprises.

The commercial plan of FC Barcelona is of a different nature. The club aspires to attain a good mixture between maximizing revenues at one side and acting as an ethical responsible world citizen at the other side. At Barcelona, the right side of the model of Dejonghe et al (see figure 1) is important as well. However, a factor that is not mentioned in the model, namely brand identity, constitutes an essential role at Barcelona. All professional football clubs have their own identity, though at Barcelona special emphasis is placed on its brand identity. FC Barcelona attempts to create a club image that professional football is not just about money, but also about cultural values, the beauty of the game and regional identity. The club distinguishes itself from most other professional football clubs by its membership structure where the supporter has power of control, its cultural sophistication, and the ideology that football is not just about business by for instance making statements like presenting itself without a shirt sponsor and the partnership with Unicef. With these traditional 'romantic' values FC Barcelona distinguishes itself from the majority of other professional football clubs that act like profit seeking corporate businesses. In fact, FC Barcelona succeeds to attract fans all over the world with this image and consequently the club's revenues increase.

Comparing Manchester United and FC Barcelona it can be argued that the former club's commercial approach is of a more direct nature by transforming the club into a corporate business and exploitation of the club's fan base. The latter club aims to create a cultural sophisticated club image for itself and thereby attracting fans worldwide that as a result bring revenues for the club, making it a more indirect approach towards the generation of income.

Ajax is a club where two opposite commercial approaches are present. In order to increase income, Ajax has adopted many corporate business principles in its organization. Examples include entering of the stock exchange market, appointment of managerial staff with general business backgrounds, setting up of extensive corporate sponsorship agreements,

installment of a customer service department, selling of youth academy knowledge, merchandizing products etc. But at the same time there is a traditional football commercial approach present at the club. One of the club`s brand strengths is the reputation of its strong youth academy. In the modern business approach a football a club should maximize revenues in order to buy the best players to generate success on the field of play. Ajax diverges from this approach by having a preference for investing money in its youth academy to raise youth players for its first team roster instead of spending money on the transfer market. Furthermore, influential people at the club aspire to replace staff in the organization with business backgrounds with people with football backgrounds. Also, the club has plans to get of the stock exchange market due to the damage it has done to the club`s brand image.

Comparison of club revenue data.

The data of Manchester United and FC Barcelona were gathered from the Deloitte annual reports of 2005 and 2012 (Deloitte, 2005; Deloitte, 2012). The data of AFC Ajax was gathered from the AFC Ajax annual reports of 2004 and 2011 (Ajax Annual Report, 2004; Ajax Annual Report, 2011).

| Manchester United | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Net total income/revenue | 367 m E | 259.0 m E |
| Match day | 120.3 m E | 92.4 m E |
| Commercial | 114.5 m E | 72.1 m E |
| Broadcasting | 132.2 m E | 94.5 m E |
| | | |
| FC Barcelona | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
| Net total income/revenue | 450.7 m E | 169.2 m E |
| Match day | 110.7 m E | 57.8 m E |
| Commercial | 156.3 m E | 45.3 m E |
| Broadcasting | 183.7 m E | 66.1 m E |
| | | |
| AFC Ajax | Season 2010/2011 | Season 2003/2004 |
| Net total turnover | 97.1 m E | 64.2 m E |
| Sponsoring turnover | 28.9 m E | 17.8 m E |
| Merchandising turnover | 9.3 m E | 5.8 m E |

Table 5: Revenue comparison case clubs

In the model, assumption 2 stated that clubs with high supporter influence have less commercial income than clubs with low supporter influence. Nonetheless, this is not in agreement with the results of the above table. The club with the highest supporter influence, FC Barcelona, has the highest commercial income and highest total income. Thus, assumption 2 is not necessarily correct.

When analyzing the revenue data in the cases, it is observable that total revenue streams and commercial revenue have increased significantly at all three clubs. This illustrates the increasing commercialization in the sport. In 2004, Manchester United had significantly

higher total revenues and commercial revenues than FC Barcelona, though in 2011 FC Barcelona had significantly higher total revenue and commercial revenue streams than Manchester United. Thus, the commercial strategy of FC Barcelona has in seven years time closed the gap and passed the commercial strategy of Manchester United. This illustrates that the traditional football commercial strategy of FC Barcelona is financially very successful and therefore shows that it is a successful alternative to the modern corporate business approach of football club management.

5.3 Supporter satisfaction

In the within case section, the data results of the two stages of the supporter protest search process were described for each of the three clubs (see Supporter Problems sections of the three clubs in chapter 4).

When the amount and nature of supporter protests are compared between the three clubs, it is observable that at Manchester United and Ajax there are significant problems with supporters. At FC Barcelona there are much less complaints of supporters.

A large amount of Manchester United supporters protest against the commercialization influenced changes of their club, for instance the flotation on the stock market, the way the club is being led as a business company, the way supporters are treated as customers etc. At Ajax there are the same supporter complaints against commercial influenced changes of the club. For instance, Ajax fans don't want to be seen as customers, disapprove of the sponsor influenced change of the Ajax shirt, the change of the Ajax logo, the increasing ticket prices etc.

However, at Manchester United the objection goes further than just complaints. Several thousand fans have taken a distance from the club and created their own breakaway club, FC United. Additionally, out of disapproval with the way things are going, 175.000 supporters have formed the Manchester United Supporters Trust with the objective of grouping their finances to buy a significant part of the club if the opportunity occurs in the future. These supporter movements are not occurring at Ajax. Consequently, the protests at Manchester United can be classified as a higher level. When analyzing the data the following levels of supporter protest can be identified:

Not much supporter protests: FC Barcelona

Significant amount of supporter protest: AFC Ajax

Significant amount of supporter protest and additionally supporters establishing organizations to dissociate or take over the club: Manchester United.

In this research the level of supporter protest is defined as the indicator of supporter satisfaction. Thus, classifying the three case clubs based on level and character of protests, leads to the following results:

Highest protests and therefore lowest supporter satisfaction: Manchester United

Lowest protests and therefore highest supporter satisfaction: FC Barcelona

Intermediate protests and therefore intermediate supporter satisfaction: AFC Ajax

Assumption 1 stated that football clubs with high supporter influence have more supporter satisfaction than clubs with low supporter influence. This is in agreement with the results found in this research, since: The highest supporter influence club (FC Barcelona) has the highest supporter satisfaction, the lowest supporter influence club (Manchester United) has the lowest supporter satisfaction and the intermediate supporter influence club (AFC Ajax) has intermediate supporter satisfaction (compared to the other two case clubs).

The result of unsatisfied supporters is that an amount of them will stop supporting the club or become less involved with supporting the club. Nash (2010) writes that large clubs appear less interested in fan opinions than smaller clubs, because they can replace the disaffected or financially excluded with new supporters that are more of the rich consumer type.

Though, there are several disadvantages to this development:

- The new rich consumer supporter is less loyal to the football club than the traditional supporter. A decrease of brand loyalty is a long term threat to an organization.
- Club identities are traditionally created by clubs together with their traditional local supporters. A decline of these supporters decreases the heterogeneity of club identities and thus clubs are becoming more replaceable.

In the case results this can for instance be seen regarding the development of ticket prices. Especially at Manchester United, ticket prices have extensively risen in order to gain extra revenue. The ticket price increasing results in the situation where many traditional low income supporters cannot afford to visit the club's matches anymore. These traditional fans are known to invest their emotion in supporting the team and the atmosphere in the stadium is to a great degree dependent on them. They are also known to keep supporting the club in difficult times when sport results on the field of play are lacking. The new high income match attendants are often of a different nature. Many of them visit the stadium to be entertained and are less loyal to the club (Chadwick & Arthur, 2008). Thus, higher ticket prices leads to a trade off defined by: Increased match day revenue, but less stadium atmosphere, which usually affects sport results in a negative way, and less brand loyalty from the new supporter. Risk: Threat long term stability of the club.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the commercialization among professional football clubs and the related issues with fan bases of the clubs. The objectives were to identify whether there are differences in commercialization strategy between football clubs with different degrees of supporter influence and how this translates into the level of satisfaction among the club's supporters.

First, the results of this research assignment are summarized. Next, the findings are discussed in relationship to the existing literature on the subject. Subsequently, the limitations of the execution of this research will be outlined and recommendations for future research are described.

6.1 Results

In this section the conclusions based on the case studies and the cross case analysis are presented, with the objective to provide answers to the research question. The results were reported of research on three investigated case football clubs.

Concerning the strategy of commercialization two different approaches were discovered. The non-membership club uses a corporate business approach that directly maximizes revenues by exploiting the market and environment. The relationship with its supporters can be defined as a customer relationship. While business features are present, the strategy of the membership club shows more traditional football elements. This club positions itself as an organization that states professional football is not only about finance, but also about cultural values, the art of the game, regional identity and acting as an ethical responsible citizen. This identity helps to attract football fans worldwide to the club. The strategy of the partial membership club can be defined as intermediate of the above strategy's.

Furthermore, the findings illustrate that for membership clubs it is possible to be financially competitive with non-membership clubs. In fact, the club in the case group with the largest commercial income is a membership club, which proves there are alternative routes to acquiring major financial capital than clubs that are set up as privately owned companies.

The football supporter is of considerable importance to the future success of clubs. The findings of this assignment show that at membership clubs, characterized by more fan influence, there is more fan satisfaction than at non-membership clubs. The social unrest and campaigns against corporatism at the non-membership club and to a lesser degree at the partial membership club and the lack of the aforementioned at the membership club, illustrates that the supporters of the membership club view their club more positively. The club appears to have found a balance between modern commercialism and traditional football values that works for the club.

The problem statement described the dilemma of the rise of commercialism with an increase of supporter dissatisfaction in professional football. After investigating the case results, it is observed that only one out of the three cases is able to tackle this dilemma effectively; only the membership club has a high degree of commercialization in combination with a high fan satisfaction level.

Concluding, it can be stated that in the domain of professional football and commercial strategy foundation, the membership club approach which focuses on football identity is a successful alternative, both financially and by success on the field, to the corporate business club approach that prevails in this age of the sport.

6.2 Discussion

The commercialization in the football industry is well described in literature (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004; Croci & Admirante, 1999; Dolles & Soderman, 2005; Duke, 2002; Milanovic, 2005, etc). Most authors agree that football clubs in general are changing more and more into globalized business corporations. For instance, Giulianotti & Robertson (2004) consider modern football clubs as 'glocal trans national corporations' and Croci & Admirante (1999) consider clubs more and more as 'publicly owned stock firms'. The findings of this research assignment are to a certain degree in agreement with these authors. I agree that the majority of football clubs are more and more transforming into corporations, as illustrated by the case of Manchester United. However, there is an interesting counter movement of membership football clubs that use a commercial strategy in which the club is staying true to its traditional cultural football roots, as illustrated by the case of FC Barcelona and to a lesser degree by AFC Ajax. These clubs position themselves as football clubs first and not as corporations.

The findings of this research have to a certain degree a fit with the model of Dejonghe et al (2010), which describes the elements that contribute to increasing budgets and consequently sport success. Like in the model of Dejonghe et al (2010), the case clubs continually seek to enlarge revenues from sponsoring, merchandising and broadcasting in order to be able to attract better resources (football players). However, an element is found in the case results, which is not featured in the model of Dejonghe et al (2010), namely: Club identity positioning. There are large opportunities for football clubs in how they position themselves.

The results in this research are in alignment with the conception of several authors who state that for football clubs the main challenge is to coordinate and combine success with a positive brand image (Kearney, 2004; Edensor and Millington, 2008). I concur with Couvelaere & Richelieu (2005) who state that the construction of brand strategy assists clubs to grow, expand and provide them with long term commercial viability. Success on the sports field, as a result of a strong financial capital position, is necessary for organizations to

prosper. Though, in order to attain supporter contentment, football fans must be able to identify and feel connected to the club they aspire to be following, and one mode to achieve this is by constructing a strong football club identity.

Concerning the issues of supporter and/or employee contentment, the case findings mostly correspond with the findings of other literature. Bruque et al (2003) write that in mutual organizations, members have an enlarged satisfaction with the corporation due to their increased participation. This is in agreement with the case findings in this assignment; in which higher fan satisfaction is found among clubs that have higher fan participation/influence.

Nonetheless, less supporter satisfaction does not imply clubs cannot be successful. A large corporate club like Manchester United can replace the disaffected or financially excluded with new fans that are more of the rich consumer category, as written by Nash (2000). Furthermore, a membership club like FC Barcelona has its own disadvantages, for instance the need to be more creative in finding ways to increase revenue, since supporters will block certain plans. Though, the problems related to supporter dissatisfaction probably outweigh the troubles related to alternative finance seeking.

Consequently, based on the case results I agree with the conception of Hamil & Chadwick (2010) that club managements should find a correct balance between commercialization and its financial advantages and attending to the expectations of the football fan. Enlarging revenues by commercialism is indispensable in modern football, though I argue that the high degree of fan dissatisfaction at highly commercialized clubs is a significant problem and should be addressed by club managements. After all, professional football is dependent on and only realizable because of the ongoing fan demand for the sport. Furthermore, the image of clubs may be harmed due to negative attention in the media.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This section presents issues regarding the limitations of the research which should be taken into consideration, and recommendations for future research.

Concerning the exploratory nature of this research assignment, one of the limitations is that the case group just consists of three case clubs. In order to be able to generalize for a large population of football clubs, or even make statistical judgments, more cases would be needed. However, although the results are based on only three case clubs, I believe that parts of the results may be applicable on other football clubs as well. The decision for investigating three cases was made in order to be able to have a more in-depth-view of each case.

Secondly, supporter satisfaction was measured based on the amount and character of supporter protests, action campaigns and other supporter disapproval in the media. It is possible that unsatisfied supporters that remain silent are more common at some clubs than other clubs. This would create a slight bias in the results.

Furthermore, in this research assignment it is argued that because of the higher level of supporter influence membership football club have more supporter satisfaction than non-membership football clubs. Though, it is possible that membership clubs have other attributes, besides high fan influence, that contribute to their higher level of fan satisfaction than non-membership clubs.

Although, while these limitations are recognized, it is argued that this study makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of professional sport and commercialization.

The findings of this research indicate that the football identity strategy of FC Barcelona is financially competitive to the business strategy that is prevailing among most professional football clubs in modern day football. Though, it just represents one case. Therefore, considering the supporter satisfaction benefits of this approach, I would recommend it would be valuable to perform more quantitative research on the financial competitiveness of football clubs that have a similar football identity strategy compared to football clubs that follow the more common business approach.

Furthermore, part of the data in this research assignment was collected by investigating actions of supporters that were featured in the media. There are other forms of research as well that might give new insights on the topic. Since professional football is dependent on the demand of the football fan, it would be valuable to gain knowledge by exploring the attitude of football fans on their views of the ideal ownership structure of football clubs and what strategy clubs should employ in this era of commercialization within the sport.

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